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PART I

RE-ADDRESSING THE ROLE OF PROXIMITY ON A MICROSCALE THE CASE OF COWORKING SPACES AND BUSINESS INCUBATORS

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FOREWORD

In recent years, the growing trend towards establishing new working spaces (coworking spaces – CSs and business incubators) that are said to be alternatives to common offices, has been observed. Following Oldenburg (1989), some authors call these spaces 'third places' in order to emphasise there are other work environments besides home and traditional offices. However, Akhavan *et al.* (2019) has rightly pointed out that CSs, which are a crucial subtype of new working spaces, often differ from typical third places such as libraries and bars; in a sense, CSs are designed and planned specifically to facilitate work by providing the basic infrastructure.

The development of CSs has been dynamic. Currently, there are over 20,000 of them in the world, and they have attracted over 2 million users (Global Coworking Survey 2019 based on Deskmag data). Besides physical co-location of users, the common feature of CSs is knowledge sharing (Capdevila, 2015).

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The development of new working spaces has been caused by many factors (Kojo and Nenonen, 2017), including the emergence of new forms of work, the high attractiveness of CSs for maintaining work-life balance, and their economic efficiency. The main success trigger of CSs is collaboration, openness and building a sense of community between coworkers (Capdevila, 2015). The creation of new, alternative work spaces is associated with the announcement of the Fab Lab Charter, the Coworking Manifesto, and the Maker Movement Manifesto (Dougherty, 2012; Hatch, 2014), which promote a common vision for these spaces across the globe.

Coworking spaces are understood as "spatial manifestations of the relationship between knowledge creation and space" (Schmidt and Brinks, 2017, p. 297). In economic geography, four research avenues are explored. First, the spatial (intra-urban or regional) patterns of CSs (Mariotti *et al*., 2017) are frequently investigated. The research is often conducted in order to detect spatial clusters and explain location patterns. CSs are often located in the most accessible and core areas. Hence, the majority of the studies focus on such metropolitan areas. Only a few studies on CSs looked at peripheral urban areas (e.g. Salone *et al*., 2017). Second, the varying impact of CSs on the local milieu (Akhavan *et al*., 2019) is studied. The direct and indirect effects of CSs' operations and coworkers' activities are reflected in social (e.g. Social Streets in Italy – Akhavan *et al*., 2019) and economic changes (employment). Third, locally and regionally varying values and norms may either be a barrier or a trigger for CSs to emerge. Hence, CSs might be studied within the broader framework of institutional economic geography. Fourth, what drives the dynamics of CSs (Kojo and Nenonen, 2017) is the historical background of the milieu and contingent events. This could be discussed within an evolutionary framework. With the majority of papers on locational patterns and factors, the first two above-mentioned avenues have been thoroughly explored, whereas institutional and evolutionary approaches are not used to analyse the emergence and growth of CSs.

The Special Issue consists of seven conceptual and empirical papers delivered by academics from Czechia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Turkey. Mariotti and Akhavan (2020) explore the phenomenon of Italian coworking spaces within the proximity construct. Based on a sample of over 300 co-workers, they have discussed the descriptive statistics of proximity measures, the factors attracting knowledge workers and the expected and perceived advantages. In the next paper, Bürkner and Lange (2020) offer a theoretical outlook on the co-creation of heterogeneous social, technological (digital), and physical spaces. They have proposed a perspective on hybrid work which focuses on contingent multiple, multidirectional and temporal scalings created by a variety of users while developing their own micro-worlds of work. These micro-worlds may be conceptualised as the outcomes of a centrifugal or centripetal movement. In the third paper, Schutjens and Kruger (2020) analyse the role of proximity in the exchange of resources within

the specific context of a business incubator in Leiden. They studied 118 business relationships of incubatees and argue that the role of geographical proximity (both between incubatees and outside the incubator) is limited. They indicate a considerable significance of personal similarity for the exchange of business knowledge. Next, Parlak and Baycan (2020) have studied the growth of creative hubs (CHs include: coworking spaces, incubation centres, makerspaces and labs) in Istanbul. The academics investigated the structure, focus, services, and values related to CHs. The main characteristics of CHs and their workers is also provided. The next paper, by Bednar and Danko (2020), provides insight into CSs as places that boost cultural and creative industries. In general, the authors examined the knowledge-related impact of CSs. Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with managers and entrepreneurs, they have argued that CSs enhance the entrepreneurship of creatives through collective projects and stimulate knowledge creation and open innovation in a creative ecosystem. Next, within a specific Polish context, Gądecki *et al*. (2020) have focussed on significant restrictions which hamper the emergence and growth of innovation districts in Cracow. Based on examples from selected neighbourhoods, they have showed how the morphology of such spaces and their functions can limit and foster development of innovative enterprises from the ICT industry. Finally, Micek (2020) has summarised the discussion on the role of various proximities in CSs. He identified the main research challenges in studying CSs from a proximity-related perspective.

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